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World of Books



'Politics of Heroin In Southeast Asia'

William Hogan

NEWS STORIES this week made much of President Nixon's pledge to cut off aid to any foreign government whose leaders "protect" international drug traffickers. This was in response to Senator George McGovern's earlier charge that the administration had failed to crack down on the narcotics trade in Southeast Asia because it needs "air bases in Thailand, Lao mercenaries and Vietnamese soldiers to fight its war."

Senator McGovern's charges could have been based on the documented book by the young Yale scholar Alfred W. McCoy, "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia." Harper & Row released it, uncut, after the Central Intelligence Agency had sought to have Harper stop publication and to discredit McCoy's investigative reporting.

McCoy presents the CIA-Harper controversy in a lengthy exchange of letters and memos prior to publication. Documentation on those strange and, for the CIA, very open pressure tactics appears in the September 21 issue of the New York Review of Books. McCoy calls these tactics "the strongest evidence of the folly of allowing government agencies to help decide what will be published."

Harper, over McCoy's objections, did allow the CIA to see page proofs of the book which analyzes the CIA's role in the international heroin traffic. But Harper

rejected the agency's suggested editing of the book. After a careful review of the manuscript and study of the CIA's objections to it, "it is our sincere opinion," a Harper's executive replied, "that Mr. McCoy's scholarship remains unshaken and we do not see any reason for making any changes."

"The Politics of Heroin" takes a long look at the Golden Triangle, where Laos, Thailand and Burma meet; it produces 60 per cent of the world's supply of heroin, including the Double UO Brand that has increasingly turned up in the New York and Miami areas. The Double UO lab was formerly owned by General Ousane Rattikone, commander-in-chief of the Royal Laotian Army in CIA-controlled territory.

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HEROIN and opium, McCoy states, have been transported in American planes (the CIA-chartered Air America). U.S. personnel may not be directly involved in the trade, but they tend to look away because drug trafficking is a tradition in that part of the world. Yet looking the other way, McCoy's book emphasizes, has increased drug addiction among Americans, both GIs and those at home.

McCoy's reply to CIA pressure: "If America's publishers are not careful to defend their own constitutional prerogatives, then the CIA, for one, seems only too willing to help them wither away."